



FIA Matters!

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Submit stories by e-mail to FIA-Newsletter@michigan.gov

Today's big story

Safe routes to schools – making a difference!

By Michelle Chockley, Family Independence Manager
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Flint's Washington Bilingual Elementary School, which houses a **Family Resource Center**, was selected by the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness, Health and Sports as one of only six schools in Michigan to participate in a Safe Routes to Schools Pilot Project.

On April 29 the Safe Routes to Schools Team hosted a "walking tour" of the routes students use to travel to and from school by foot or bicycle. The purpose was to collect information to improve walking and biking safety.

To prepare for the walking tour, children and parents of Washington Elementary completed surveys. Results showed one-third of parents drive the kids to school and about a quarter either ride the bus or combine riding the school bus with parents driving them to school. The parents' childhood behavior is opposite of what their children are doing today, as almost two thirds of the parents walked or biked to school in grades 3-5.

The majority of Washington students felt walking was fun, very healthy and cool. However, more than two-thirds think it is not safe to walk to school. To make walking and biking to school better, 60 percent of students said it would help to have more friends to walk or bike with and half indicated no strangers along their school route would enhance their safety.

On the day of our walk, members divided into six groups on school routes to identify poor sidewalk conditions and to identify where crossing guards were needed, abandoned homes, unleashed dogs, illegal activities, etc. Recommendations from this event included addressing a pickup/drop off time to help with traffic and safety; designating a few routes as walking routes; then educating and encouraging students to use those routes.

Since this event, two of the abandoned homes in our Washington neighborhood have been cleaned up. There is an ongoing action plan with recommendations, tasks, persons responsible and a timeline to continue this effort.



One reason two-thirds of Washington School kids think it is not safe to walk to school becomes obvious in the photo.

Family Resource Centers

The Family Resource Centers are placed in or near priority schools to coordinate services according to the goals developed and shared by the family, community, school and all other agencies involved. These centers serve as a "one stop shop" for family services located within or near a neighborhood school. There are currently 19 operating around the state with 20 more scheduled to open in the upcoming school year.

Long term goals are to:

- Create a user-friendly environment for families in need of state and local human services.
- Pool resources of state and local agencies for efficiency.
- Ensure that families' needs are met through comprehensive services that

lead them toward stability.

- Expected outcomes are to increase academic performance, increase parental participation, decrease absenteeism, truancy and student school behavior problems.

Preliminary feedback from the local communities is positive. Family Resource Specialists' (FIA staff persons working in the centers) anecdotal evidence from families served indicates improved classroom behavior and increased family stability.

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Macomb County Boy Scout earns Eagle rank for helping homeless & FIA

From Karen Urquhart, Community Resource Coordinator
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David Hamel loves being a Boy Scout. This fact is evidenced by the sash that he proudly wears which is filled with merit badges extending down the length of his body and continuing on to his back. Each badge represents an honor he has earned; many of the badges were earned more than once. It is David's goal to earn as many merit badges as he possibly can.



David Hamel, his parents and Scout committee member Dave Plttman present the completed Refresh'mint kits to Macomb County FIA at the Mt. Clemens office.

David announced his desire to perform a community service project toward earning his Eagle Scout Badge, a very high honor. To earn it a scout must plan, develop and give leadership to others in a service project that would benefit any religious institution, school or the community.

About the same time, the Macomb County's Volunteer Services office initiated a project to benefit the homeless population in our community. This project was named Refresh'mint Kits and designed to provide homeless persons that come into Macomb County district offices with basic personal care items. Each kit would also contain mints to validate its name. We began seeking groups in the community interested in putting together such packages to keep on hand in our offices.

When David was presented with the idea, he enthusiastically decided to take on this task as an avenue for earning his

Eagle Scout Badge. David rallied the other members of his troop, his family and friends to help him accomplish this project. David's mom, Joan Hamel, reports that the generosity of businesses and individuals contributing to David's quest was phenomenal. Donations poured in from every direction in support of his endeavor.

David far surpassed our expectations, providing more than 200 kits packed full of personal care and essential items, each destined to give a little bit of comfort and dignity to our customers. Along with the completed kits, came additional boxes of extra items and \$150 worth of McDonald's coupons to allow the homeless to purchase a hot meal.

Because of David's goodwill, determination and hard work our office pantries are now full of Refresh'mint Kits and many people in this unfortunate situation will benefit from his kindness! Congratulations David! You are an inspiration for others.

■ *David Hamel is a member of Boy Scout Troop 390. All of the members of this troop are developmentally disabled. Troop members range in age from 13-65 years old. The troop has been together for 25 years and David has been a member for 15 years.*

Benzie FIA volunteer appreciation luncheon

From Shirley Sawdy, Departmental Analyst
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Benzie-Manistee FIA honored registered volunteers who have donated their time to the Benzie County FIA and to our clients June 16 with a Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon at our office. The Volunteer Services program and Benzie County FIA staff provided the program. Following the luncheon, Benzie Manistee FIA Director **Doug Lapham** and Community Resource Coordinator **Cosette Schaefer** presented volunteers with certificates of appreciation.



Benzie County volunteers at the program.

Twenty-three volunteers were honored, although not all were able to attend. The volunteers have provided assistance to the Benzie FIA office from 15 years (dedicated volunteers Gertrude Saffron and Katherine Morgan) to 1 year, with an accumulated total of 98 years of service. They've helped as office aides, work group activists, senior companions, home help aides, customer advocates, transportation providers and on many special projects. Cosette Schaefer made a special visit to the Maples Nursing Home to present a certificate of appreciation and a plate of the luncheon items to 15-year veteran volunteer Katherine Morgan. We would like to take this opportunity to once again thank all the generous people of Benzie County who continue to give time, money and goods whenever we ask.

Making democracy accountable in Arenac & Bay counties

By Karen S. Smith

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Arenac County FIA hosted an employee recognition event June 28 where state Sen. Jim Barcia of Bay City and state Rep. Jennifer Elkins of Lake expressed their appreciation to the staff for their dedication and hard work in these stressful times. This visit was part of the Employee Recognition Week activities.

Barcia and Elkins spent 90 minutes with staff talking about how business was conducted in Lansing and how the budget cuts were affecting FIA and other state agencies.

They spoke about how the poor and needy do not have much voice in government so the programs that benefited them are usually the first to get cut. They understand cuts make our jobs more stressful and difficult. During a question and answer period afterward, they fielded questions on the Adult Medical Program freeze, Adult Home Help cuts and "80 and out" retirement, then shared in refreshments.

Bay County also had the pleasure of meeting and talking with Barcia and state Rep. Joseph Rivet of Bay City on May 14 during a similar event. The event was similar – they spoke about current events, had had a question and answer period along with refreshments.



Left to right: Linda Simons of the Arenac FIA Board, Kathy Cholak-Jones, Bay-Arenac FIA director, state Rep. Elkins and Sen. Barcia, Ardith Fales of the Arenac FIA Board. They attended an employee recognition ceremony where the elected officials spoke and answered questions from FIA staff.

News You Can Use

Stress management information available online

From David Ware, Employee Service Program

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The state of Michigan Employee Service Program introduces its most recent Web-based online program, Systematic Stress Management Program: The Proven Way to Relax". This is available to all state employees and adult family members, is anonymous, free and available 24 hours every day of the year.

To maximize the benefits, we recommend you complete Understanding Stress first. It provides the basis for stress management program and consists of a range of topics including types of stress and how to identify them.

You can take the course by logging on to the Web link www.michigan.gov/ose and "About us" and the Employee Service Program link. On the home Web page, scroll down to the "Online Stress Management Program" link.

If you wish to consider professional services for stress, please contact the Employee Service Program at either of the telephone numbers listed on the ESP home Web page.

New QuickKnowledge course – "Retaining Valuable Employees"

Information: Janet Waterstradt

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Effective recruitment and performance management are only half the battle—once you get talent, you have to keep it! "Retaining Valuable Employees" shows a manager how. This new Web-based course takes about one hour to complete, and it's available to all FIA employees.

You can access it at any time in the Office of Professional Development's learning resources database at <http://www.quickknowledge.com/qk/alliance/TipInteractive/popups/Courses/Preview.asp?courseid=191> Click on "more info" next to the course name.

You can also search the database for other Web-based courses. Go to <http://performance-architect.mfia.state.mi.us/resourceTools/SearchResources.asp> Then, in the drop-down boxes, select "Web based training" and the category of resource that you are interested in, and click on "Search."

**Your letters,
intercepted
and otherwise**

Date: May 19
To: Clinton County FIA, St. Johns
Subj: **Nancy Rogers, Family Independence Specialist**

I would like to take this opportunity to express an overwhelming abundance of appreciation for the woman who single-handedly saved my family from devastation – Nancy Rogers of Clinton County.

Last October, the perfect plan for our future was to move into this little mobile home my mother found for us. My husband would work for my parents' company. Work was steady and lined up for years. Our home would be the perfect size, and a huge step-up from the tiny two-bedroom we were sharing in the inner city. My son would be closer to his school. We would have our first yard!

Due to unforeseen circumstances, my parents company fell under. My husband was laid off from work. The one or two weeks of the month we could find temporary job opportunities was not enough. We have a seven-year-old-son and a daughter, newborn this past July. We both labored night and day for any means of employment. I had open-heart surgery earlier that year – while I was four months pregnant for our daughter – that took me from work and college unexpectedly.

The panic of that stress is unbearable. Then I had remembered that my caseworker from FIA had told me to report all household changes. I called her to let her know that my phone and heat were threatened to be turned off, and that my family was going to be evicted and homeless by the end of the month. We could not make ends meet (and) were choosing between heat or diapers, food for my son's lunch or medicine for the baby. It all seemed so hopeless and overwhelming.

Then, like the grace of a universe that finally did something right for a change, Nancy Rogers did an amazing thing. In all my tribulations she offered something that was like a magic bean in my garden of bad luck. She cared. With respect, compassion and efficiency this beautiful person guided me through the system to help keep our heads above water. Mrs. Rogers gave me options and means for helping myself. She told me what she could do to help, as long as I did my part to help her help my family.

I wasn't interested in a handout; all we needed was a leg up. Now, my husband is back to working full-time. Instead of scrounging to pay for hotel rooms and storage for our belongings we are able to stay caught up. We still are catching up, but we have the opportunity to be productive members of society.

I realize that with budget cuts, staff shortages, system renovations and a devastating caseload, FIA workers are justified for feeling helpless. But Nancy Rogers is awe-inspiring. She consistently treated me like an intelligent adult and with respect. Thank you Nancy Rogers. Everyone that works with her should thank her, too. She is a superlative person to represent the Family Independence Agency. We are all blessed to know a world with her in it.

The Tammy Sullivan-Johnson family
Lansing

Date: Oct. 10, 2003
To: Allegan County FIA, Allegan
Subj: **Steve Rodriquez, Eligibility Specialist**

My husband and I went to see one of your workers – Steve Rodriquez – for food assistance today. We read our letter wrong and got the dates mixed up, and came today and actually our appointment was yesterday. So without question he took us back and started the process.

I understand he didn't have to do this but out of the kindness of his heart he did. He was very courteous and helpful telling us what we needed to know and help us any way he could. Mr. Rodriquez went above what he had to do for us. We just wanted to send you a letter and tell you what a fine employee you have working for you.

Jennifer & Roger West
Monticello, Ind.

FIA Matters! is a product of Michigan's
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